Poli. 338: Policy Analysis:
Spring 2016

Robert Stein
Herzstein 202

Tue/Thurs: 9:25-10:40
Room TBA

Required texts:

Shahidur R. Khandker, Gayatri B. Koolwal and Hussain A. Samad, *Handbook on Impact Evaluation*, World Bank (Available as a free *ebook* at http://www.stata.com/bookstore/hoie.html)

David L. Weimer and Aidan R. Vining, *Policy Analysis* 4th or 5th edition
* Readings available at course owlspace site

Course requirements:

Qualifying examination:	100 points
Team projects:	200 points

This course provides an introduction to how policies, in both the public and private sectors, can be scientifically evaluated for their internal and external validity. Students will be expected to master a core literature on methods of policy analysis, basic information about different types of policies and how the adoption and implementation of policies can influence both intended and unintended effects.

This course is designed to provide the foundational knowledge for policy analysis as well as practical hands on experience. For the first four weeks of class, students complete assigned readings and class time will be devoted to group discussions, not lectures on the readings. In the fifth week students will take a qualifying examination to test their understanding of the basic concepts and tools of policy analysis. Starting in week five, students will work in teams to evaluate current policies and proposals before the City of Houston and other local and state jurisdictions. Each research team will complete a policy briefing memo and make a public presentation.

After the qualifying exam on February 9 student teams[1] will meet twice weekly during the class time (Tuesday and Thursday) in our assigned classroom to work on their team project. Research teams comprised of 4-5 students per team will be assigned a specific research question for investigation. Students will be expected to review literatures on the policy question, identify best practices, make policy recommendations, provide supporting data for these recommendations and design a program for implementing and evaluating the policy recommendation. I will be available to consult with each team during the scheduled class time and by appointment.

[1] Student teams will be assigned by the instructor based on skills, interests and experience need to complete the team project.

Syllabus:

January 12, 14

Topics:
Rationales for public policy
Limits to public policy
Intervention market failure and its correction
A systems (biological) model of public policy

Readings:
Weimer and Vining, ch. 2, 4-7
*Bryan Jones and Frank Baumgartner. 2012. "From there to here: Punctuated Equilibrium to the General Punctuation Thesis to a Theory of Government Information Processing," *The Policy Studies Journal* 40(1,2012):1-1.
*Max Rose and Frank R. Baumgartner. 2013. "Framing the Poor: Media Coverage and U.S. Poverty Policy, 1960-2008." *Policy Studies Journal* 41(1, 2013):22-53.

January 19, 21

Topic:
Alternative solutions to policy and market failures
Systematic thinking about evaluating policy
Designing effective policy evaluation
Basic Issues of Evaluation

Readings:
Weimer and Vining, Chapters, 8-13
*"What is Research Design?"
*"Steps for Successful Policy Analysis"
Khandker et al, Chapter 2: Basic Issues of Evaluation

January 26, 28, February 2, 4

Topics
Randomization
Propensity matching
Double difference
Instrumental variables
Regression discontinuity

Readings:

Khandker, Chapters 3-7

*Gerber, Alan S. & Donald P. Green. 2000. "The Effect of Nonpartisan Get-Out-the Vote Drive: An Experimental Study of Leafletting." *Journal of Politics* 462 (3):

*Stein, Robert & Greg Vonnahme. 2008. "Engaging the Unengaged Voter: Vote Centers and Voter Turnout." *The Journal of Politics* 70 (2): 487–497

* Stein, Robert, Birnur Buzcu-Guven, Leonardo Duenas-Osorio, Devika Subramanisan. 2014. "The Private and Social Benefits of Preparing for Natural Disasters," *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 32(3):49-483

*Green, Donald P. and Daniel Winik. "Estimating the Effects of Incarceration and Probation on Recidivism among Drug Offenders." In 2010. *Criminology*. 48(2): 357-387.

*David Card and Alan B. Krueger. 1994. "Minimum Wages and Employment: A Case Study of the Fast-Food Industry in New Jersey and Pennsylvania." *American Economic Review* 84:772-

*Gerber, Elizabeth and Daniel J. Hopkins. 2011. "When Mayors Matter: Estimating the Impact of Mayoral Partisanship on City Policy." *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 55 (2): 326–339

*Kam, Cindy D and Carl L. Palmer. 2008. " Reconsidering the Effects of Education on Political Participation." *The Journal of Politics* 70 (3): 612-631

*Johnson, Martin, W. Phillips Shively, and Robert Stein. 2002. "Contextual Data and the Study of Elections and Voting Behavior: Connecting Individuals to Environments." *Electoral Studies* 21 (2): 219-233

Qualifying examination February 5-9

Dates for team meetings

February 9 – April 22:
Research team meetings.

Due dates for work product submission:

February 25
Literature review of research and best practices
Reading: * Policy Briefing Outline

March 10
Proposed policy recommendations

April 7
Proposal for implementation and evaluation

April 22 and Final examination date:
Research team presentations (Four presentations per date)

May 4
Final policy briefing memo

Memo Topics

Houston Parks and Recreation Department #1: Keeping parks safe for users

Patrons of some Houston parks have found safety to be a major obstacle to their use of these facilities. The Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD) is interested in understanding the nature, origin and veracity of these perceptions and how HPARD should respond.

Houston Parks and Recreation Department #2: Park connectivity

The Houston Parks and Recreation Department has identified park connectivity through a network of hike and bike trails as one of its major strategic goals. What are the needs and limits of achieving this goal given the current network of hike and bike trails? How and where might HPARD best leverage achieving this goal?

Houston Public Library (HPL)#1: Neighborhood library use

HPL would like to know whether the type of materials (e.g., adult books children books, DVDs, computers, magazines, etc.) used by HPL customers are related to specific social, demographic and geographic characteristics of their users and the different libraries at which they use these materials.

Houston Public Library #2: The virtual library

There is a significant demand at the Houston libraries for digital and internet services, including demand for computer time, classes and online services (e.g., library databases). How should the Houston Public Library integrate digital and internet services into their capital planning?

City of Houston SafeClear Program: Balancing safety and congestion

The City of Houston's incident management program *SafeClear* was adopted in 2003 to facilitate the rapid removal of disabled vehicles from the roadway before they caused collisions resulting in personal injuries and property damage. Another anticipated benefit from the *SafeClear* program was a reduction in roadway congestion from disabled vehicles. Research has shown that there may be a trade-off between these two goals for the program. How might this city operate the *SafeClear* program to minimize both roadway congestion and secondary collisions?

Planning for natural disasters

The City of Houston and Harris County have experienced significant challenges in preparing the public for responding to severe weather and natural disasters. Many residents either do not prepare for approaching severe weather or fail to take the appropriate actions to respond to pending severe weather e.g., not evacuating at the appropriate time or not taking actions to shelter in place. What are the optimal strategies and ways for City and County officials to communicate information to the public about how to prepare for and respond to approaching severe weather?

Historic Preservation

Since 2008 the City Houston has allowed property owners in local neighborhoods to petition for the creation of historic districts in which residential construction and renovations are regulated by specific standards. How have these historic districts impacted property values in Houston and other cities?

Election Day Vote Centers

Election Day Vote Centers (EDVCs) allow voters on Election Day to cast a ballot at any polling place location in the voting jurisdiction rather than at only one local proximate to their the voter lives. These locations are more centrally located to where voters are likely to travel during the day, are larger locations with more voting machines, staff to assist voters and parking. Harris County is considering adopting EDVCs after the 2016 election. What are the best practices for designing a EDVC plan for the Harris County?